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SUBJECT: VIJAY NAMBIAR BRIEFS THE COUNCIL ON SRI LANKA

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On April 22, the Security Council met in an "informal interactive discussion" format to discuss the humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka. The Secretary-General's chief of staff, Vijay Nambiar, briefed on his recent visit to Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Ambassador also briefed on behalf of his government. Following conclusion of the meeting, Council members agreed unanimously for the Mexican President of the Council to brief the press on the following points: strong support for the efforts of the UN and the Secretary-General in Sri Lanka; condemning the LTTE and demanding that they lay down their arms; expressing deep concern about the humanitarian situation; urging all parties, including the government of Sri Lanka, to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law; and urging further steps be taken to allow for the safe evacuation and treatment of IDPs. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Vijay Nambiar briefed the Council on his recent trip to Colombo. He noted the government's refusal to call for another humanitarian pause because the government says it would be exploited by the LTTE. He also discussed the UN's possible role in assisting the government, and said the government had committed to allowing a UN team into the conflict area, but said the modalities of that were still to be worked out. Nambiar expressed disappointment that, despite assurances, the government of Sri Lanka did not "consistently or fully" implement measures to minimize risks to trapped civilians. These civilians, said Nambiar, are in "extreme peril." He stated that "both sides have failed in their responsibility to protect civilians." Nambiar urged the Council to act together to address this issue. He added that the government needed to look beyond the current situation to achieve long-term political reconciliation.

¶3. (SBU) Ambassador Palihakkara of Sri Lanka defended his government's actions, and said the Defense Ministry told the government that it had not fired deliberately on civilians. Palihakkara also said the government had no plans for a large-scale movement by the military to enter the remaining safe zone. He expressed openness for a UN role and said the government will pursue other options for an end to the fighting with the LTTE.

¶4. (SBU) On substance, Council members largely shared the same views. All countries called on both sides to uphold international humanitarian law, condemned the LTTE, and supported the role of the UN. China, Russia and Vietnam were more muted than previously in their support of the government of Sri Lanka, and dropped their opposition voiced during the last interactive discussion to allowing the President of the Security Council to present a summary of the discussion to the press. France, the United States and the United Kingdom pointedly underscored the responsibility of the Sri Lankan government to protect civilians. Japan entered into a lengthy discussion supporting the decision of the government of Sri Lanka not to allow another humanitarian pause, and along with China, Russia and Vietnam, emphasized that the LTTE was wholly to blame for the situation.

15. (SBU) At the conclusion of the meeting, Council members unanimously agreed that the Mexican President should brief the press on the meeting. The Mexican Ambassador noted the following points: the Security Council expressed strong support for the efforts of the UN and the Secretary-General in Sri Lanka, condemning the LTTE and demanding that they lay down their arms, expressed deep concern about the humanitarian situation, urged all parties, including the government of Sri Lanka, to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and urged further steps be taken to allow for the safe evacuation and treatment of IDPs.

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